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SUBJECT: MAJOR COVERAGE OF AMBASSADOR'S THANKS TO BAHRAINI
PEOPLE FOR HURRICANE ASSISTANCE

REF: STATE 163279

1. Major Arabic and English dailies carried a statement September 7 from the Ambassador expressing "profound gratitude" for the \$5 million offer of assistance from the Government of Bahrain, as well as the many gestures of compassion, concern, and generosity shown by the Bahraini people. English dailies Bahrain Tribune and the Gulf Daily News carried the statement on the front page. Arabic dailies Al Ayam and Akhbar Al Khaliy printed the statement in full with a photo of the Ambassador. Following a meeting with the Ambassador, Minister of Labor Al-Alawi thanked the Ambassador for his press statement, which he said was very much appreciated by the Bahrainis.

2. The Ambassador gave a one-hour interview to government-owned Arabic daily Al Ayam and its English sister paper Bahrain Tribune on September 6, in which he thanked the Bahrainis for their pledge, and commented on the outpouring of support from friends around the world during America's time of need. The article is expected in print in the coming days.

3. Spotting a potentially positive human interest story, APOA placed a stranded New Orleans-based Bahraini Fulbright Exchange Scholar, Dr. Mohammed Merzaa, in touch with English and Arabic dailies in Bahrain. In the interviews, Dr. Merzaa told his story of evacuating his residence at Tulane University as hurricane winds approached. His harrowing tale of escape and heartwarming stories of kindness from American families along the way were the subject of stories in six Bahraini dailies and was featured on Al Jazeera's talk-show, "From Washington" on September 5. In the Bahrain Tribune Dr. Merzaa comments, "The US State Department and the US Embassy in Bahrain were very supportive, as was the Fulbright Foundation. They offered help and kept my family informed of the situation."

4. Commentary on Hurricane Katrina was almost uniformly positive, with one exception. The disaster was covered as a major story in all newspapers and broadcast media. A frequent critic of U.S. policy, writing in Akhbar Al Khaliy, applauded the humanitarian response and criticized extremists who have characterized Katrina as God's wrath on the United States. In an Al Ayam news report of a session of parliament, Minister of Parliament Mohamed Al Sheikh expressed reservations on the \$5 million donation. He and others argued that the government should have consulted parliament first, and that the amount could have been spent on needy Bahraini families. On the other hand MP Ahmed Behzad pointed out that there was no reason for these reservations as the aid was a humanitarian gesture.

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